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Letter dated 5 December 2018 from the Permanent Representatives of Peru, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Peru and Sweden, as co-chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, hereby transmit a summary of the meeting held on 18 October 2018 on the situation in the Central African Republic (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Gustavo **Meza-Cuadra**
Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations

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Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations

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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security

Summary of the meeting on the situation in the Central African Republic, 18 October 2018

On 18 October 2018, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security held a meeting on the situation in the Central African Republic. The members received a briefing from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Central African Republic and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, experts from the Mission and representatives of the United Nations country team. The Special Representative provided a comprehensive overview of key developments since the previous meeting and of progress and challenges in implementing commitments with regard to women and peace and security.

Members of the Security Council asked questions about the participation of women in the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, the use of the recommendations of the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation in the current talks, the visit of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic, the financial needs of the joint rapid response unit to prevent sexual violence against women and children, the ongoing work of MINUSCA to support the participation of women as candidates and voters in the 2020 and 2021 elections, the capacity of the Mission and the country team to report effectively on conflict-related sexual violence and the impact of insecurity, poverty and human rights violations on women, in particular on the access of girls to education. Several Council members asked for specific details about the exchanges of the United Nations with the Government regarding the current lack of participation of women in the African Initiative and the need to go beyond plans to include them as observers. Below are the main points raised in the briefing and during the meeting:

- The African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic is moving forward with increasing momentum, but more must be done to ensure the participation of women, a central point made not only in previous resolutions and statements by the Security Council, but also during the visit by the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Bintou Keita, in June 2018 and the solidarity visit led by the African Union Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa), the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) in August. The panel of facilitators has asked the parties to ensure that civil society organizations, in particular women's civil society organizations, are invited as observers to the direct talks between the Government and the armed groups. Several actors, including political parties, national authorities and international partners, have promised to ensure the meaningful inclusion of women in the consultations ahead of the talks. The Community of Sant'Egidio has organized a series of mediation training courses for women leaders, and local women's groups have organized workshops to raise awareness among their communities of the African Initiative. In addition, the African Women Leaders Network

launched a national chapter in the Central African Republic in July, bringing together women leaders from civil society, the security sector and public administration. Women leaders and women's civil society organizations in Bangui and the provinces continue to play an important role in conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation at the local level, engaging directly with armed groups to urge them to lay down their arms and stop their attacks on civilians.

- Women make up only 14 per cent of ministers, 8.5 per cent of the National Assembly, 8.3 per cent of the High Court of Justice, 22 per cent of the national Economic and Social Council, 17.3 per cent of the civil service and 9 per cent of prefects and sub-prefects. The Government has adopted a law establishing that a minimum 35 per cent of elected and nominated positions in Government must be occupied by women, but a presidential decree needs to be signed for its implementation. The decree has now been drafted and validated and is ready for approval by the Council of Ministers. Some recent proposed revisions to the electoral code that are awaiting formal adoption should also eliminate barriers to the participation of women in the forthcoming elections. Since April, a group of women leaders have been lobbying for these revisions and presidential decrees in various activities supported by MINUSCA, UN-Women, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Development Programme, with funds from the Peacebuilding Fund and in partnership with the relevant government ministries.

- Human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law have significantly increased, including in areas that until recently had enjoyed relative stability. Insecurity, high levels of poverty and limited access to basic services continue to severely affect the well-being of women and their socioeconomic opportunities. For example, school enrolment rates for girls have decreased. Violence against women and girls remains a constant threat, and 177 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence have been recorded since the previous briefing, affecting 140 women and 85 girls. Such incidents often involve multiple victims and multiple perpetrators.

- A national strategy to combat gender-based violence (2018–2021) was adopted in November 2017. In September 2018, after one year of operations of the joint rapid response unit to prevent sexual violence against women and children, the United Nations organized a workshop to take stock of the unit's achievements. More than 350 cases have been registered with the unit, and demand is high for its services, exceeding its current capacity. Five United Nations police officers are co-located with the national police and gendarmerie in the joint rapid response unit. Nine of the unit's 30 staff members are women. However, although the unit has a national mandate, it can operate only in Bangui, and staff retention is very low. Most importantly, none of the registered cases have been followed up with indictments or trials. The six international magistrates of the Special Criminal Court include three women, but all the national magistrates are men. A national network for the protection of victims and witnesses of sexual and gender-based violence, in particular conflict-related sexual violence, is being established. The working group of the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence meets on a monthly basis to exchange information and decide on interventions.

- Women make up approximately only 20 per cent of beneficiaries of community violence reduction and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration projects and 40 per cent of beneficiaries of stabilization programmes.

- Although MINUSCA has developed a Mission-specific gender parity strategy, women make up 24 per cent of total staff, including 29 per cent of international staff, 17 per cent of national staff and 20 per cent of senior management. Furthermore, the strategy does not include uniformed personnel and there are multiple barriers to its implementation.

UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict read out some of the recommendations highlighted in the background brief shared with the participants. They included:

- In the forthcoming resolution on the Central African Republic, the Security Council should maintain and expand upon the gender-related elements of its resolution 2387 (2017). In particular, it should express alarm about the lack of representation and influence of women in national decision-making structures and the African Initiative, and underline the importance of the participation of women in the peace process and related consultations, the local peace committees established by the Ministry of National Reconciliation, the forthcoming elections and the implementation of the national recovery and peacebuilding plan, as well as in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, security sector reform, community violence reduction and transitional justice.

- The Security Council or individual Council members should encourage the Government of the Central African Republic to update its national action plan on women and peace and security. The Government should work with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to update their joint communiqué and time-bound commitments, and non-State actors should be urged to make similar commitments.

- The Security Council should urge national authorities to provide the joint rapid response unit to prevent sexual violence against women and children with sustainable and operational support, including a dedicated budget, and ensure that its cases are followed up through the judicial chain, working in collaboration with the prosecutor of the Special Criminal Court.

- The co-chairs of the Independent Expert Group should request the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic to provide an informal update on the implementation of resolution 2399 (2018). The Committee, which now has exemplary language on sexual and gender-based violence, should consider listing ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka commanders for these violations.

The co-chairs closed the meeting, thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, MINUSCA and the country team for their participation, and committed themselves to follow up on the recommendations.